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EIGHTH GRADE COMMUNITY WORK



“For many years it has been a custom, a tradition, for every eighth grade to do something fine for the school. We, too, wanted to show our devotion to the school. We wanted to give it the best, the finest thing we could make.” So begins one of the eighth grade books, in which the children recorded their work in the spring of 1911, upon *The House*. “*The House*” is what they call it, in large capitals, on the covers and title pages.

At the outset of the work, Charles was appointed official photographer. And when, long after despair of ever seeing any prints had settled on our hearts, he did at length stroll in one morning with the finished pictures, the quondam carpenters seized paste pot and pen, as they had handled hammer and nails. Their chuckles as they mounted the pictures were a pleasure to hear. We might not notice the sagging roof beam in this one; but the boys who tightened up that roof beam and put in two sets of collar beams to strengthen it, have strong muscular association with that print. We might think this picture a representation of an unfinished shack, but the young workmen remembered how their hearts leaped the day the roof went on. Every picture called up memories of the good fellowship of the class, their pleasant banter of each other, their appreciation of good work. For it reminded them of aching muscles or of long hours of voluntary labor. Their books of mounted photographs, each with a few words of comment, were of course the merest side issue, intended only for their own pleasure. But we believe that they reflect the actuating spirit of the class, and therefore are quoting largely from them in order to give an account

of this community project, which Mr. Wahlstrom worked out with the class as part of their regular handwork.

As we reread the books, we could hear the children again, early in the winter, eagerly discussing what they should do for the school.

"In the beginning of the year," says one book, "we looked at all the things that other eighth grades had done for the school, and we decided to build a house. We discussed many plans, but on the whole the house seemed the best."

The house agreed upon, the chase was up indeed. If they were to build a house for the playground, they felt that it must embody their ideals of good taste. In the minds of their elders, it must improve these ideals somewhat, but that must wait. Every pupil thought he knew what constituted beauty in a house, and was bent on winning his twenty co-workers to his point of view. Sketch after sketch came in, photographs of their own summer homes, half-tones from magazines. Size and proportion must be determined, number of windows, placing of windows. Some of the books contained carefully worked out drawings by which the owners sought to convince the rest that leaded panes were a *sine qua non*, or casement windows, or a Dutch door.

One of the best workmen among the girls dismisses this long discussion laconically. "We were busy," she says, "making drawings of windows, doors, sidings, and different houses."

At this stage most of the books touch humorously on our contact with the city authorities. Stanford wrote to the Building Commissioner, informing him of our plans, and inquired whether a permit was necessary. With its usual courteous promptness, the city hall informed us that we could not have a permit and should not be allowed to erect such a structure under any circumstances. It was first-hand information with a vengeance. The children had supposed that what they built was no one's affair, and fire limits became a stern reality. Mr. Wahlstrom appeased the powers by what the children always thought was a time-serving concession,—namely, calling our heart's delight a "shed."

"Mr. Wahlstrom," says Waldo, "went down to get a permit. In it the house is disrespectfully called a 'shed.' (Shame on that permit!) But we don't think of that, and we call it the Club House. Mr. Hendry has been carrying the permit in his pocket in case an inspector should come, and ask for it. "Then" (apparently if the permit were not forthcoming) "the work would be stopped."

But they do not forget that slur upon their project, Mention of it crops up, here and there, along with pride in their progress, and appreciation of the devotion of people who worked early and late.

"The house does not look like a shed to-day," appears under one picture—a picture that would not perhaps awaken the same pride in your heart that it does in Margaret's. "Some boys have been working early in the morning and late at night. Some of the girls stayed to help with the roof."

Nothing shows more clearly the children's feeling that this was a piece of genuine work than the hours they spent on it.

EIGHTH GRADE CONSTRUCTION CO.			
TIME CARD			
Name <i>Charles Pain</i>			
Date	Time	Worked on	Check
Mar 23	7:45-11:30	Sawed Ribs & dug holes	S.P. ok
Apr 10	11:35-12:15	Digging Post-Holes	S.P. ok
Apr 11	1:05-3:15	Setting Sills	P.A. ok
" 18	1:15-3:15	Framing	L.W. ok
" 25	1:15-3:15	Sawing Rafters	L.W. ok
5-2	1:15-3:15	Ridge - Siding	P.A.
5-9	1:15-3:15	fitting frame	P.A.
5-16	1:15-3:15	" "	L.D. ok
6-23	1:15-3:30	Siding	L.D. ok
6-1	1:15-3:15	battens - above roof	C.T. ok
6-6	1:15-6:00	battens - above roof	C.P.
6-10	9:45-12	Odd jobs	ok
6-10	1:15-1:30	" "	ok
6-13	9-9:35	Fitting windows	ok
6-13	10:20-2:30	" "	ok

"TIME SPENT.—This is one of the many time cards printed. We printed the cards so that we could keep an official record of the time spent. The total time spent was 727 hours and 38 minutes. The average time spent was 34.6 hours. Paul worked the most, 73 hours and 10 minutes. We started to work March 23, and finished June 13."

The class was divided into sections with a pupil as foreman of each. To every group a certain part of the work was assigned, such as shingling, sawing rafters, nailing battens. These assignments were changed from time to time, and the personnel of the groups shifted in order to give each person experience with many processes. The pupils were directly responsible to their foreman who inspected their work, criticised and helped them, and checked up their time cards at the end of the day. The time cards and foremen added dignity to the enterprise.

"March 23.—On this day the Eighth Grade Construction Company started operations on the magnificent Club House in the playgrounds of the Parker School. First we marked where the posts were to be dug; next, most of us dug holes, while a few sawed the posts. We were glad to get the house under way."

One afternoon a week, from 1:05 to 3:15 was the regular time set for the work, but overtime was the rule rather than the exception.

"April 10.—To-day was not a regular working day," says Paul, "but a few of us went out" (after school, of course) "to get all of the piers ready, so that we could start right to work on the sills. We discovered that a few of the posts had been set in way off, so we had to dig them up and set them in right."

"June 1.—As there are only two more regular working days, we will have to put in some extra hours. It was a dandy day to work—not too hot or too cool."

"At stopping time," writes Caroline, "all the boys left but Victor and Paul. Grace, Gwen, Enid and myself stayed. We finished putting the glass in the window frames. Enid and Grace left. Then there were four poor souls left to work, and so we worked on, watching the ball game in between times, and going back to our work with a sigh. Then there was a thrilling moment,—the score stood eight to eight, even innings, with one out and Lawrence up to bat. The pitcher threw a wild ball to first, the first baseman missed it, the man on third ran home, and made the score nine to eight in favor of the Frogs."

"June 1.—Another busy day gone, and a lot done, but only Paul and Victor worked until five o'clock. Some of the girls, as was natural, had to take some little exercise jobs, like putting the glass in the window frames. But let me tell you, they would not have had them in to this day if it had not been for some enterprising boys in the group."

"June 6.—This was our regular working day. Waldo, Charles, Oswald, Victor and myself worked at shingling all afternoon, until about eight o'clock. We had our dinner on the roof, and we got about two-thirds of the west slope done, and the porch roof shingled. Shingling is dandy fun. Quite a few of the girls were glazing today."

"June 7.—To-day was Field Day, and so only a few worked in the afternoon. Charles Walker got here at 6:15 this morning to shingle."

"June 8.—To-day I got to school at 5:10, and finished the shingling on the west slope. In the afternoon the girls turned out in force, because they all want new dresses, and the easiest way to get them is to spoil the old ones painting. A few of us boys were shingling, and these boys stayed until 8:45 and finished the shingling."

"June 10.—To-day was Saturday, and everybody was supposed to come early in the morning and work until the house was finished. At noon we were to get lunch—ice cream, lemonade, cake and sandwiches. We were so sure of finishing to-day that we had an article printed in

the 'Parker Weekly' that said the house was finished. We didn't finish, but we would have probably done so if the people had come earlier and stayed later. But as it was, the majority of the class didn't get around until about ten o'clock, and two of the girls, even, came just half an hour before lunch time, and after having lunch of course they suddenly remembered an important engagement, and so left. Then, too, what seemed to be little finishing touches a month ago now appeared as a good day's work. We finished making the door, put the ridge board on, and worked on the floor. Battens had to be put on at different places; painting had to be done; more glazing; the hinges put on the windows, and several other jobs. In the afternoon we started painting the roof. The color is green, and it looks well on the house. Charles Pain, Charles Walker and Jack stayed late and painted the entire roof."

The spirit of goodfellowship between boys and girls was very pleasant to watch. All were engaged in a piece of hard work. There was time for some good-natured banter, but no time for nonsense. Of course the children exercised their immemorial privilege of grumbling at each other, at the weather, and at Mr. Wahlstrom.

"May 2.—I was greatly disgusted," says Jack, ruefully, "because Mr. Wahlstrom told me to plane the ridge pole, and it took me all afternoon. If he had used the buzz saw, it would have taken only a minute."

However much they jeered at each other, they were appreciative of hard work, devotion, energy, and enthusiasm.

Many eighth grades have done for the school pieces of work of which they were justly proud, and which have been very useful, but "The House" embodied some special advantages, from the teacher's point of view, as a piece of community handwork. One of these advantages lay in the fact that, hard as the work was, progress was visible.

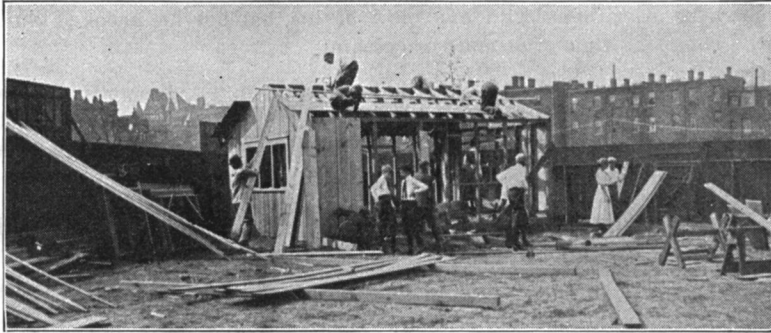
"And we haven't much more to do now," begins one hopeful comment, "only to shingle the roof and put on the battens and the aprons, and glaze the windows, and put them in the frames, and lay the floor, and stain the house, and paint the roof, and—well, it takes too long to tell the rest, so I will leave it out. But the house will be finished soon."

"To-day Sarah and Caroline put some of the siding on the south end of the house. We seem to be progressing rapidly. The weather is getting quite warm, but we seem to get a lot done anyway."

"Today we have done great work. The house is springing up as if fire crackers were under it. It looks like a really truly house. The window frames are here, so we put one in just to see how it looked. We

are going to have a porch, so that the corner posts were set, but without ceremony, for we are common laborers and have to work by union time. We have no time for ceremonies."

"We got three sides up before we had to quit. That's going some for an afternoon's work."



"April 25.—A few of the boys dug the holes for the porch piers, while the girls put braces between the floor joists. Three of us sawed out the rafters. This took until about three o'clock. Then Jack, William and myself nailed the rafters on. It was a pretty good day's work."

Often the tone of the comment shows that muscles, tired in the service of others, leave a kindly feeling for those others.

"To-day the house seemed to spring up. Three of the boys got up on the roof and put the roof beams on. Our house is the latest toy. The younger children seem to have a fine time climbing on it. We built the house for them, so we don't care if they want to have fun."

This kindness, in spite of the fact that the roof sagged after the youngsters had had their fun.

"May 17.—Behold! Marvel! Wonder! Surprise! (Charles has snapped his camera just after the roof beams went up. We all share the joy Sarah expressed.) I say that is a house, and you deny it. Therefore, I will compromise with you, and say it is the skeleton of a house. I will tell you a secret—a house is like a man; the skeleton must be strong. Now, three young and inexperienced carpenters put in the sills. Along came the foreman, laid a heavy hand on the said sills, and they all came down."

The other two girls also who engaged in the memorable struggle with the sills, still bore the scars when they came to mount their pictures. They both comment on it:

"This was a memorable day," says Gwen, "Enid, Sarah and I were set to work on the sills. After each one had measured the length, to be sure it was right, we took turns in sawing them. When we looked

at them, we exclaimed in chorus, 'How crooked they are.' The next difficulty was to make them fit. The nailing was the hardest. The nails had to be on a most undesirable slant. Gripping the nail with one hand and the hammer with the other, and bringing it down with a whack on your finger instead of the nail, were the joys of putting up these sills—only to tear them out again, for tear them out we did. When Mr. Wahlstrom saw them, with one blow of his hatchet he knocked them out. The next time was more successful."

"To-day the studs are up on all sides. We put the sills for the windows in, but it was an undertaking. They had to be just so—just level and just to the right height. The nails that we had to put in were terrible. They almost wouldn't go in."

But the scars that hard work leaves are honorable, if the work has in itself enough of inspiration. If this year's task helped the children learn the priceless lesson that hard work is not synonymous with drudgery, it paid for itself. There does not appear a shade of resentment for aching backs and blood blisters, broken nails and trying weather.

"To-day," says Eleanor, "was the hottest day you can imagine. The boys put half of the roof on in spite of the heat. The boys knew that we would have hot weather later, so they had courage."

Evidently, it is one of the three sufferers who put in the sills who says, with marked pride in their progress:

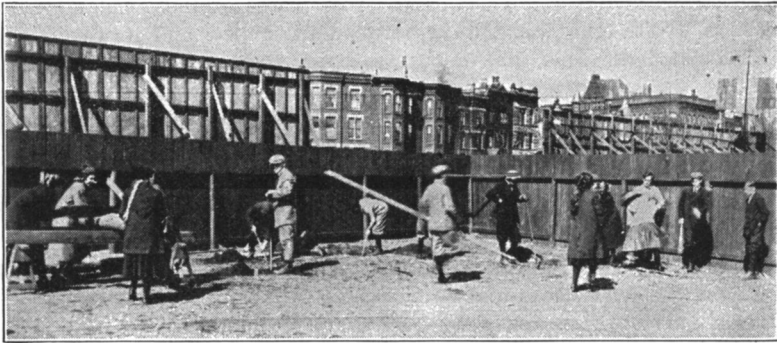
"Now the siding is on all sides except the back. The sheathing for the roof is almost all on. It is so hot that we are trying to work inside. We put braces between the studs. They are almost as hard as putting in the sills."

Even such a thankless job as ripping out poor work gets only a slight groan from Paul:

"Mr. Wahlstrom discovered some bad places in the shingling, and Stanford, Eleanor, Grace and myself had to rip up the shingles and then patch it up right. That was awful! The staining was started to-day by a few of the girls. The color is brown and it looks well on the house."

Whether it "looked well on the house," was a matter of anxious concern to people who had put the house up from its foundation. There is no book that does not include memories of hard labor. If the reader will permit, we will turn back to the beginning of Eleanor's book.

"We started to work on the house about the first of April," she writes. "The first thing we had to do was to mark off the foundation. The main point was to get the corners square. After the foundation was marked off, every one was to dig a hole for the cedar posts. The weather wasn't warm, but we got warm digging. We got backaches also."



Another of the same date says:

"See the start of the house. The foundation is the most important thing. Our foundation was of cedar posts. We got the posts eight feet long, so we cut them in half, which was a mighty job. While some cut, the others dug. Now the holes for the posts are all dug. But oh, my, the four-foot holes were hard to dig! But such fun as we did have. The frame work is started. The sills are all on."

"Mighty jobs" were plentiful. Here is another:

"May 16.—This afternoon was hotter than before. Stewart, Caroline, Jack and I had to finish the roof boarding. Putting on roof boards isn't so easy, for most of the boards were warped over an inch."

There is no doubt that the fun of building the house will always live in their memories. Those long spring afternoons outdoors were as full of joy as of labor.

"We want you all to know what fun we have had building the house," Eleanor said in the morning exercise. "We are very proud, because the handwork is to be exhibited in it. We hope that you all know of something, work or play, that you would like to do in your house."

Another child said, in the same exercise:

"But besides the pleasure of giving to the school a testimony of the loyalty of the eighth grade of 1911, we have had the pleasure of doing the work. We can witness that there is no such fun as building a house."

Sometimes their happiness at the time they did the work is reflected in the spontaneity of the account a boy writes when the Velox Memorial of some special day's labor is before him.

"May 9.—The first thing we had to do to-day was to make the roof level at the ridge. Mr. Wahlstrom had a happy thought. He noticed that the walls bulged out slightly at the front and back, so he got a strong rope and tied it between the roof plates of these bulging sides. Then a two-by-four was put in between the ropes, and it was turned. This twisted the rope, and of course it was tightened. This pulled the bulging walls into plumb and also squeezed the ridge until it was straight. Patent applied for.) Of course it is understood that if you let your roof sag, you must also let the sides bulge out."

The longest and wordiest of all our discussions was over the siding.

"The peace movement is gaining," Linus remarks. "The long war between the barn-siders and shinglers is over. It was settled by arbitration (?)—anyhow, you don't hear many complaints. Mr. Wahlstrom says things are going fine. Hurrah!"

Such a reminiscence of a long struggle shows no scars—and we submit that after argument had been bolstered up by appeals to architects and contractors, by careful drawings, models and pictures, the experience of changing one's convictions, or of subordinating one's individual opinion to the general wish was invaluable. Every piece of technical knowledge was interesting because it was essential to their great end.

"A lot of the children ran to Mr. Wahlstrom and said, 'The roof is sagging. The roof is sagging in the middle of the roof beam.' We had to cut collar beams and brace the rafters."

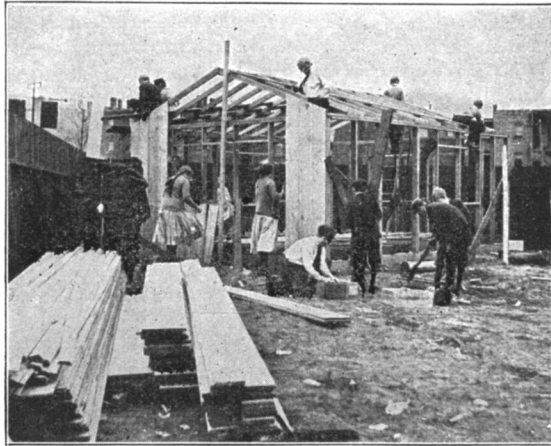
Sarah bursts into dithyrambs over one print that evidently reminds her of a good day's work, as well as an aching back.

"June 1.—See the wonders of to-day! See our window frames and panes. Some of us have turned glaziers instead of carpenters. With putty and chisels we go to work. First we knead the putty; then make long coils out of it as if it were clay, and put it on a window pane and apply our chisels. That is the process of glazing."

Here is another bit of technical knowledge which to their surprise they find is every carpenter's rule-of-thumb:

"Square Corners.—In order to make the foundation of our house, we had to see that the corners were square. We found a way that you

could tell whether they were square or not. If you have a triangle, with the base 6 inches and the altitude 8 inches, what is the hypotenuse? The hypotenuse is 10 inches. So if you have a board 10 feet long, you can see if the corner is square. We took a cord that was 6 feet long and another 8 feet. We made a corner out of it. Then we put the 10-foot board across the corners. If the cord comes at each end of the board, the corners are square."



The value of the work in technical drawing, which Mr. Wahlstrom gave them while the weather was still too cold for outdoor building, was obvious. They all mention it.

"To build a house, one needs plans, so we went to work with a T-square and drawing board to make plans for our house. We made the floor plan, side elevations, front and back elevations. We made these drawings to a scale of one-sixteenth of an inch to an inch. After making these drawings, the construction of the house was plain to us."

"We made our plans before we started to work out of doors. As our plans were all finished, there was no delay talking about what we should do."

"We made the mechanical drawings, so that we could tell how the house would look before it was made. It helped us to solve some of the problems that we had to deal with."

"The Model.—Two boys made a small model, to show the construction of a frame house. It was built to scale, and when finished will be exactly like the real house. We used the model in making our mechanical drawings."

Board measure had more than its usual romantic interest, when we found that lumber was high and our allowance small.

"Board Feet.—We found that in order to figure up the cost of the lumber for the house, we should have to know what a board foot was, because all lumber is sold by the board foot. A board foot is 1 foot long, 1 foot wide and 1 inch thick. Lumber is sold per thousand feet. The price it is commonly sold at is \$25.00 per thousand feet. To find the number of board feet, you multiply the length in feet by the width in feet, and by the thickness in inches.

"Examples of finding the number of board feet:

"2 x 4—6 ft. long $\frac{1}{2}$ x 6 x 2 = 4 board ft."

There was an explanation similar to the foregoing in almost every book, accompanying the complete bill of lumber which every child worked out.

Bill of Lumber

Piers			
10 7 in. cedar posts	@	50	\$ 5.00
Sills			
6 2x6—12 ft.	@	22	1.58
6 2x6—8 ft.	@	22	1.056
2 2x6—16 ft.	@	22	.704
4 2x6—10 ft.	@	22	.88
4 2x6—8 ft.	@	22	.704
2 2x6—10 ft.	@	22	.44
Corner Posts			
8 2x4—8 ft.	@	25	1.086
Studs			
30 2x4—8 ft.	@	25	4.00
Roof Plates			
4 2x4—12 ft.	@	24	.77
4 2x4—8 ft.	@	25	.533
4 2x4—16 ft.	@	25	.381
Floor Joists			
12 2x6—16 ft.	@	22	.266
Rafters			
20 2x4—10 ft.	@	24	10.92
420 ft. 1x6—16 ft. matched	@	26	7.41
Porch Floor Joists			
10 2x4—10 ft.	@	25	1.75
Porch Rafters			
10 2x4—8 ft.	@	25	1.33
Porch Roof Plates			
2 2x4—12 ft.	@	24	.38
2 2x4—8 ft.	@	25	.26
Porch Roof Boards			
168 ft. 1x6—16 ft. matched	@	21	3.52
Porch Floor			
114 ft. 1x6—16 ft. matched	@	26	2.39
Siding			
510 ft. No. 1 White Pine	@	33	16.83
6 1x10—16 ft. No. 1 White Pine	@	33	2.65
Battens			
460 ft. 16 ft. 2½ x ¾ flat			4.20

All of us were interested in the process of raising the studs and getting the roof plates up.

"After we put the sills on the posts, we started to put up the studs. First we marked off on the sills just where we wanted the studs. Then we took a piece of 4 x 4, the same length as the sill. We nailed the studs to this piece of 4 x 4. Then we turned it up and nailed the other end of the stud to the sill where we marked it off in the beginning."

We learned something about shingling, besides its being "dandy fun."

"June 5.—To-day a few of us boys started shingling the roof, but we did not get much done. The first row had to have two layers of shingles, one on top of the other, but the others have to have only one layer. We used a board for a marker. The shingles are to be laid $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches to the weather."

In short, a considerable part of the children's pleasure in looking back over the quarter's work seems to be in their interest in new processes.

"It has really been great fun to build our house, and besides, we have gotten a knowledge of how a house is built. The house cost in the neighborhood of \$175.00. Tomorrow we are to hold a reception to the Senior Class and their friends, in the house, just after the play."

They had every confidence that it would be used and loved. Margaret quotes Stevenson:

"My house," I say, but hark to the sunny doves
That make my roof the arena of their loves;
That gyre about the gable all day long,
And fill the chimneys with their murmurous song.
"Our house," they say, and "mine," the cat declares,
And spreads his golden fleece on the chairs.
And "mine" the dog, and rises stiff with wrath
If any alien foot profane the path.

And she goes on—

"We call the house 'our house,' but that was only while we were building it. Now that it is finished, we want every one, from the kindergarten through the high school, to call it his house."

Another child does her best to express the feeling of the class about their work:

"We want the house to stand as a symbol of what the school means to us, and what we would mean to the school. We want every little child to play in it, and feel that it is his house. We want the big people to hold their club and class meetings there, knowing that the house was built for them. We want the high school pupils to think it is a pleasant

place to spend their study periods, as the house was built for their enjoyment. We wish everybody to take pleasure in the house."

Class spirit of the most wholesome kind was an unquestionable product, and the earnestness is genuine with which one of them speaks for the class in the "Commencement Recorder."

"The eighth grade has built a house. It is our undertaking for this year, as eighth grades have always done something for the school. It has taken us many hours, which have been used with devoted zeal and energy. We have put into that house many things other than lumber. We have put into it school spirit and loyalty. It was a pleasure to work on the house and think that we were doing something that would stand for the eighth grade of 1911, and we want the school to consider the house as belonging to them."

The technique involved in building such a house is well within the capacities of eighth grade children; more so in fact, than many projects which are often attempted at the work bench. The fact that it is a sure-enough "job" with foremen, and that the workmen are handling standard sizes of timber and materials gives added zest to mastering the technique. Then, too, there is the consciousness of serving the community through a usable, necessary piece of work. There is hardly a community—no matter how small—or a neighborhood in a large city—no matter how crowded or cramped—which could not well utilize the efforts of a group of children in a similar project. Just to mention a few of the possibilities, there would be the opportunity of building a shelter in a small park or playground; a club house similar to the one worked out might well be built at some distance in the country and used as headquarters for nature study excursions from the schools, where might be stored much of the apparatus which is taken along on each trip. The school garden or farm may need a tool house. The introduction of shop work in rural schools and small towns is often prevented because of lack of room. Let the class build such a small frame building on the school lot to be used as a shop. Or a group of pupils could be taken into the country for a week or two, with tents, camping outfits, and tools, and combine with their vacation some useful work. The resulting cottages—one each year, perhaps—would prove of material assistance to the work of some Fresh Air Camp.

The technique of house building and framing has long been a part of the manual training course in many high schools and technical schools. Usually this is taught by means of small models erected in the shop or on the lot—only to be torn down and the lumber converted into stock again. Many times these houses have been elaborately worked out to scale—plastered, painted and decorated. Think of the many opportunities that have been lost; of the criminal waste not alone of lumber and material, but of the fine stuff of which good citizenship is made. True the cold, technical facts may have been brought forth and illustrated, but how much better to have added to them the warm human element—the element of service and the knowledge of sharing in the useful work of the world.

